

January 18, 2011  
100 Jefferson Court  
Polson, MT 59860

call out

Chairperson Roberts and members of the committee, for the record my name is Lisa DiGiallonardo and I live in Polson, MT. I wanted to come to you today first to thank you for the help my son has received from the CAW and then to ask that you extend and expand this desperately needed service.

Although many can imagine the anguish of having a child diagnosed with autism, what most would not understand is the crush of the aftermath. I have three sons, the middle child of whom was diagnosed with autism when he was three. Dominic is now five and this is his story.

After he was diagnosed my husband and I jumped immediately into research. We spent hours online and reading books trying to find answers on how we could help Dominic. While the AAP only recently admitted that 10 to 15% of children with this diagnoses can recover completely, I found many parents and researcher who have been exclaiming this for years. The only thing I found in common in all the stories was the fact that early and intensive treatment was essential.

This is when the guilt hits. Imagine trying to give your child the 8 hours a day of one on one intervention that is recommended. Imagine doing this while caring for an infant and a husband and an older child. I can remember weeping because I could only get in two hours a day of real work. Knowing what you have to do and not to being able to provide it causes a huge burden of guilt. To miss your son's games and mother day teas and parent teacher conferences in the hope it might make a difference to his brother...this is a gut retching choice.

Then, we won the lottery. That is how I explain it to family and friends. The day I got the phone call telling me Dominic had been chosen for the CAW, before I could even accept this wonderful gift, I threw up. I had a complete physical reaction to the chance of help.

So it really is my honor to tell you about the changes in Dominic. When he was diagnosed he was non-verbal, self-injuring, and my family was almost completely housebound. Dominic would melt down if someone rang the doorbell, or approach us when we walked outside, or if someone said hi to him. When I say meltdown I mean ear splitting screams, and lashing out and crying...it would take up to 20 minutes to console him. He had extreme anxiety.

Enter the CAW...<sup>Part from them</sup> My son is now in all day Kindergarten, with an aid for about half of the day. He speaks in sentences, is in the highest reading and math group and even has a best friend. His name is Jeremiah. He runs to answer the door bell and greets whoever is there with a hello. He goes bowling...which is huge because he has an auditory sensory

issue. He is a great help at Safeway and will converse with the checkout person. He is going to basketball games and seeing his dad coach, and his brother play.

I realize that this program must be at great expense to the budget, but even his teachers have commented on how much it saves in the long run. We project that he will not need any aid, even part time after first grade. It is true, that these kids need a lot of early help, but for many that is all they will ever need. This program must take a large amount money, but I promise you that what you are buying here is PRICELESS. Thank you again, for Dominic, and for my family.

Lisa DiGiallonardo  
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